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Administrative Law Judge Backs Veterinary Board on Pet Teeth-Cleaning

SACRAMENTO — The Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) of California has instructed a Southern California woman to stop “teaching, performing and directing others to perform” a popular anesthesia-free teeth-cleaning procedure now widely available at California pet stores and dog-grooming salons.

The board’s action follows a September 29 ruling by an Administrative Law Judge that the teaching of the procedure to lay people by Temecula-based Canine Care Inc. amounted to “aiding and abetting” the practice of veterinary medicine without a license. The ruling was part of a decision concerning two VMB citations.

Administrative Law Judge Ralph B. Dash rejected arguments by Canine Care Inc. President Cindy Collins, who provides training in the procedure to “independent contractors,” that the teeth-cleaning method by lay people was cosmetic and permitted under California law. He said Canine Care and Ms. Collins, who is not a licensed veterinarian, should be “permanently enjoined” from teaching the technique, which includes placing a splint in the animal’s mouth and removing plaque and tartar with a dental scraper.

“Without question, the techniques of anesthesia-free teeth cleaning taught by Respondent Collins fall within the definition of a dental operation,” Judge Dash wrote. Under California law, those types of procedures must be performed or supervised by a licensed veterinarian.

He noted that the teeth-cleaning was clearly marketed as beneficial to the animal’s health, although as performed by Canine Care, the procedure failed to protect against tooth decay.

“The fact that it fails (to help the animal) ... does not convert a veterinary dental procedure into a purely cosmetic one,” Judge Dash wrote.

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Ironically, Judge Dash dismissed VMB citations against Collins and teeth cleaner Linden Clark that arose from injuries to a dog that had its teeth cleaned in 1999 at a Burbank pet salon. The judge said a hearing on the case held earlier this year failed to establish who cleaned the dog's teeth.

The VMB filed the citations after the dog's owner discovered her pet's jaw was broken in three places shortly after picking up the animal at the salon.

Susan Geranen, Executive Officer of the VMB, said she was pleased with the judge's decision.

"The legal conclusion of Judge Dash are on target and support the Board's action, even though the citations were dismissed," Geranen said. She noted that the Board had been concerned about lay people performing the teeth-cleaning procedure for some time, and that another animal had died in a separate case.

The mission of the Department of Consumer Affairs' Veterinary Medical Board is to provide protection for consumers and animals through proper licensing of veterinarians and registered veterinary technicians, and through vigorous, objective enforcement of the California Veterinary Practice Act. Learn more on the Board's Web site at www.vmb.ca.gov.

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